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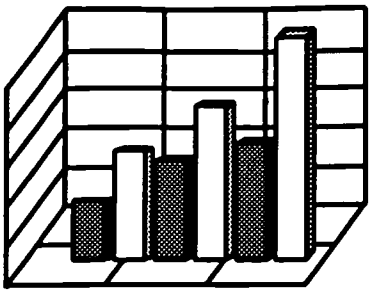
ABSTRACT

The Enacted Practices Evaluation Model (EPEM) is an accountability system for "promised" program practices. Evaluating programs in terms of implemented treatment (i.e. enacted practices) in ways that yield valid and reliable results for accountability purposes is among the most vexing challenges in the field of program evaluation. Evaluations conducted by internal staff provide economies and efficiencies that come with organizational familiarity whereas external experts in the target program's content area provide credibility and objectivity. This paper presents the organizational structure and operational procedures of an accountability system, the EPEM, that adheres to the "Program Evaluation Standards" and maximizes the contributions of institutional resources and procured expert services. As implemented in the Prince George's County (Maryland) school system, the EPEM involves three school district areas (Magnet School Program Office; School District Research, Evaluation and Accountability Office; and magnet school supervisory and instructional staff) and a set of external content expert evaluators. Responsibilities of these four entities are keyed to the "Program Evaluation Standards" and its areas of utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. (Contains 2 figures and 10 references.) (Author/SLD)



Research, Evaluation & Accountability

Enacted Practices Evaluation Model

Paper presented at the
Sixth Annual National Evaluation Institute
Indianapolis, Indiana
July 9, 1997

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Enacted Practices Evaluation Model[1]

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Abstract: The *Enacted Practices Evaluation Model* (EPEM) is an accountability system for "promised" program practices. Evaluating programs in terms of implemented treatment (i.e., *enacted practices*) in ways that yield valid and reliable results for accountability purposes is among the most vexing challenges in the field of program evaluation. Evaluations conducted by internal staff provide economies and efficiencies that come with organizational familiarity whereas external experts in the target program's content area provide credibility and objectivity. This paper presents the organizational structure and operational procedures of an accountability system (EPEM) which adheres to the *Program Evaluation Standards* and maximizes the contributions of institutional resources and procured expert services.

Hey! Accountability is more than outcome! Accountability is also quality of experience!

Accountability seeks evaluation information on the extent to which a program is effective after it is fully implemented; but to answer that question it is first necessary to know how and the extent to which the program was actually implemented. Unless one knows that a program is operating according to design, there is no reason to expect it to provide the desired outcomes. This is not a question of summative versus formative evaluation, but one of quality assurance that instructional practices and curriculum opportunities meet certain standards of excellence. Mohr (1992) points out that the quality of instructional practices and opportunities enacted by a program is as much an accountability issue as any summative information about outcomes.

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[1] Paper presented at the Sixth Annual National Evaluation Institute, Indianapolis, IN, July 9, 1997.

Evaluation of enacted program practices is a particularly acute accountability issue for Magnet program schools. Magnets are an "internal school choice" program which promise parents that their students will experience "...distinctive, high-quality course offerings not available in neighborhood schools" (Clewell and Joy, 1993, p. 61). The RAND Corporation defined school choice as a full-time educational program available to students on a voluntary basis, which is distinctly different from the majority of programs a school district offers. Beginning in 1985, PGCPS established and maintained an unusually large and diverse set of magnet programs as an instrument of desegregation by offering parents and students choice of educational opportunity. In fact, a recent court appointed panel comprehensive review of school desegregation in Prince George's County found that "... the choice aspect has become dominant in the eyes of parents and the public, even as the school system tries hard to maintain the primacy of the desegregation purpose." (Peterkin, Rossell, Shoenberg, & Trent, 1997, page xiv-xv).

The Magnet emphasis on program practices and opportunities require an accountability assessment system which evaluates the scope and quality of program practices and opportunities actually enacted. This is the purpose of the *Enacted Practices Evaluation Model* accountability assessment system developed by Research, Evaluation and Accountability that is described in this document.

Enacted Practices Evaluation Methodology: *What is it?*

According to one of the earliest of modern evaluation theorists, Michael S. Scriven, evaluations can be designed and used in two ways to make educational programs and educational products more responsive to community needs:

> Evaluation may be done to provide feedback to people who are trying to improve something (formative evaluation); or to provide information for decision-makers who are wondering whether to fund, terminate, or purchase something (summative evaluation). (Scriven, 1980, pp. 6-7).

More recently, Scriven (1986) and many other leaders in educational evaluation (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991), have elaborated the role and types of formative evaluation methodology, softening the distinction between formative and summative evaluation, so that some forms of formative evaluations can provide a summative-like accounting of the implementation success achieved by an educational program. The evolution in formative evaluation methodology over the past three decades has yielded two major types of program implementation assessment: (1) *program monitoring* or *evaluation for program improvement*, and, more recently, (2) *measuring attainment of process objectives* or *determining achievement of means-goals*. The focus of the former methodology is to describe the program that is occurring -- whether or not this matches what was planned; whereas the latter formative evaluation methodology is directed at an assessment of implementation activities and practices featured in a program's stated curriculum goals. The primary purpose of the first, more traditional formative evaluation is to provide assessment information for program improvement; the primary purpose of the second, accountability formative evaluation is to provide assessment information for judging the success

of program implementation. It is the fulfillment of this latter purpose, the accountability assessment of the quality of *program treatment* (i.e., instructional practices and opportunities) provided by Magnet programs, that the *Enacted Practices Evaluation Model* (EPEM) methodology has been designed to deliver. Perhaps it is helpful to consider EPEM as a formal methodology for conducting a "certification" or "audit" evaluation of the instructional practices and opportunity-to-learn activities that were "promised" to parents and students by a Magnet program.

In an attempt to distinguish the EPEM methodology as an accountability assessment of designated program practice objectives we use the term "enacted practices" rather than program "implemented practices." Formative evaluation efforts traditionally focus on a program's implemented practices, whether these practices are those specifically designated as the defining or unique characteristics of the program or not. On the other hand, "enacted" connotes doing what has been designated, promised, or advertised. The EPEM is an accountability system for designated program practices.

The EPEM system represents the confluence of school system administration resources, evaluation design standards and measurement theory. Each Magnet Program evaluation study of enacted practices includes the following critical components:

- <u>*Program Evaluation Standards*</u>,
- coordination between internal and external agents,
- identifying measurable program enacted practices,
- methodological triangulation, and
- dissemination and utilization procedures for evaluation results.

Each of these components are critical to the EPEM goals for employing methodology which meet rigorous standards for program evaluation, take advantage of existing institutional resources, and yield credible and useful accounting of the quality of enacted practices for all types of Magnet programs. It is the opinion of the authors that, together, these components form an integrated structure, or logical whole, for carrying out high quality evaluation of program practices.

What are the guidelines for an effective evaluation?

In 1981, a Joint Committee issued one of the most significant documents to date in the field of educational evaluation entitled *Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials*. This reference and its most recent update: *Program Evaluation Standards, 2nd Edition*. consist of a set of 30 standards to be used both to guide the conduct of evaluation of educational programs, projects, and practices and also to judge the soundness of such evaluations. The 30 standards are grouped according to four attributes of an evaluation -- its utility, its feasibility, its propriety, and its accuracy. These guiding attributes played a powerful influence in the development of a quality assurance evaluation system to assess the instructional practices and curriculum opportunities provided by a variety of Magnet Programs in Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland. Guided by the *"Standards"* the Research, Evaluation and Accountability office of PGCPS developed the EPEM to provide objective and credible evaluation information on the **quality of Magnet program implementation.** Throughout this paper, relevant standards are highlighted in boxes like this [Z0]:

Z0 SAMPLE STANDARD - The standard number, name, and description most applicable to each section of the text is included in a box like this.

Appendix 1 list the 30 *Program Evaluation Standards* in summary form. These will be referred to simply as the *"Standards"* in this document.

Who conducts the evaluation?

U1. STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION - Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed.

In keeping with the goal for ensuring that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users, the *Enacted Practices Evaluation Model* (EPEM) uses a team approach which maximizes institutional resources into an external expert evaluation system [U1].

The *Enacted Practices Evaluation Model* (EPEM) leverages the procured content expertise of external evaluation consultants through the designated contributions of central office Magnet and Research staff along with school based program staff to each evaluation of program practices. The evaluation design, assessment implementation and measurement credibility are maximized through the collaboration of four parties:

1. Magnet School Program Office
2. School District Research, Evaluation and Accountability (REA) office
3. Magnet school supervisory and instructional staff from the participating school(s)
4. External Content-Expert Evaluators

Each of the four (4) parties agrees to perform specific activities in the evaluation process [P2]. The first three parties are school district employees. The external experts are contracted for a single evaluation effort. Figure 1 presents an outline EPEM project schedule showing when and what each of the four EPEM team parties do in a typical Magnet program evaluation study.

P2 FORMAL AGREEMENTS - Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally to renegotiate it.

Figure 1

EPEM Project Schedule

Stage	Activity	Lead Agent(s)
1	Select Program & Secure Superintendent's Approval	Magnet Office
2	Identify Measurable Practices	REA & School Based Program Staff
3	Develop RFP to select external content expert[1]	REA
4	Review/Rate Proposals	Proposal Review Committee[2]
5	Proposal Recommendation(s) sent to School Board	Superintendent
6	Award Contract and Approve the EPEM study	School Board
7	Initiate Study, Planning Meetings, Orientation	Magnet Office, REA, School Based Program Staff, & Contracted Experts
8	Instrumentation, Assessment & Analysis	Contracted Experts and REA
9	Report and Presentations[3]	Contracted Experts and REA
10	Disaggregated Results to individual Magnet program schools in study	REA and Magnet Program Supervisory Staff

1. Request For Proposal describes the EPEM methodology, measurable program practices which are the target of the particular study, and the schedule of deliverables.

2. Proposal Review Committee has a core representation of Community Advisory Committee (CAC) members, REA staff, Magnet Office staff, Grant Officer, Chief Divisional Administrator from Instruction, and a school-based staff member from the Magnet program to be evaluated.

3. Report and Presentations are disseminated according to the following schedule: 1) Superintendent's Executive Council, 2) School Board, 3) Magnet program schools, and 4) the CAC.

The distribution of responsibilities are stipulated in the RFP and further clarified during meetings in the early stages of the evaluation process. The evaluation itself is a highly cooperative process and thus easily accommodates task adjustments, should it become necessary. Now, let's look at each of the EPEM team agents and their primary contribution to each Magnet program evaluation study.

1. Magnet School Program Office

The Magnet School Program Office is the party responsible for initiating the evaluation process and using the results. This office selects which of the Magnet programs are eligible for evaluation, secures the Superintendent's approval to expend evaluation resources in the target programs, and establishes the accountability purpose for the evaluation effort in the Request for Proposal (RFP). The Magnet Office closes the feedback loop by determining the use of the evaluation results. The bulk of this party's efforts are at the beginning and end of the evaluation project.

The Magnet Office funds the evaluation and thus determines the cost limit on external expertise. This office also identifies the scope and timing of the evaluation, in light of system needs [F2]. This office issues the Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek contract bids, and participates in the process of selecting the external expert.

F2 POLITICAL VALIDITY - The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their cooperation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.

The Magnet Office is the primary agent for dissemination of program evaluation results. There is a wide range of interest in Magnet school evaluation results which include the executives and policy makers of the school system, media, courts, individual schools, independent researchers, and, of course, parents. While a technical evaluation report is suitable for some of these audiences, the Magnet Program Office works closely with the Research Office to reformat and present program evaluation results in a variety of ways to make it useful to the particular audience in need of information [U7].

U7 EVALUATION IMPACT - Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

Of course, one of the primary operations of the Magnet Office is to work with the evaluated schools subsequent to the evaluation to see that recommendations and findings are addressed (i.e., school/program improvement).

2. School District Research, Evaluation and Accountability (REA)

REA guides the evaluation design and coordinates assessment administration. REA is ultimately responsible for the quality of the evaluation, and is thus actively involved throughout the process. In a sense, REA conducts the evaluation, with the external experts serving as the assessment agent responsible for interpreting results in terms of content standards. It is important to realize that the contributions of external content expert evaluator on the evaluation team **is not** a "*labor saving device*"! The EPEM requires that REA coordinate and administer all facets of the project operations, including close supervision and facilitation of the contracted external content experts, in order to deliver the information in useful forms as designated by the

Magnet Office.

From the inception of the evaluation process, REA is involved in the construction of the list of measurable enacted practices, the drafting of the RFP, and the selection of the external expert. The expression "Plan your work, and work your plan" is key to EPEM implementation, and the RFP represents the plan. A prerequisite to drafting an RFP is that REA work with the staff of targeted Magnet programs to clearly identify the enacted practices in measurable terms (more about this later). Critical components in each RFP are: an operational description of the Magnet program (vs. "policy" description), identification of the measurable enacted practices which are to be assessed by the external content experts, the study schedule, and the scope and nature of dissemination (i.e., reports and presentation requirements). Appendix 2 provides an example RFP. Once the contract is bid, REA conducts meetings with school staff and external experts to distribute tasks and develop the project schedule as previously listed in Figure 1.

REA works with the external experts to develop assessment instruments. The instrumentation and sampling methods are designed with an adherence to those *Standards* which will promote validity, reliability, and consistency with previous evaluation efforts. Enacted practices evaluations identify multiple assessment sources and a variety of assessment procedures (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and review of documents and extant data). Typically, evaluation data input is sought from parents, teachers and students in addition to the evaluators' own observations via classroom observations, or lesson plan reviews, or both.

REA verifies that the assessment instruments are valid [A5]; that is, that they will legitimately assess the program's designated practices. In addition, REA ensures that they are reliable [A6]; specifically that a sufficiently large, and unbiased, sample is assessed.

A5 VALID INFORMATION - The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the interpretation arrived at is valid for the intended use.

A6 RELIABLE INFORMATION - The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed so that they will assure that the information provided is sufficiently reliable for the intended use.

REA's knowledge of the effectiveness of previous assessment efforts in PGCPS is invaluable in guiding the external experts to gather a sufficient and worthwhile pool of data. Often the data collection period is constrained by time demands such as standardized testing, thus it is particularly important to plan ahead, gather all information as efficiently as possible, and then get out of the school quickly [F1].

F1 PRACTICAL PROCEDURES - The evaluation procedures should be practical, to keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained.

During the data collection phase, REA assists the external experts to facilitate speediness. Although the external experts conduct all specialized or interactive activities (i.e., focus groups, interviews, classroom observations), REA staff may prepare, administer, and/or conduct data entry of surveys, for example. All raw data is available to both

A7 SYSTEMATIC INFORMATION - The information collected, processed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.

parties. Although the external expert is responsible for data analysis, REA performs verification tests to assure quality [A7].

During the analysis and report writing stages, REA again performs a supporting role for the external experts. REA provides guidance regarding the report structure and level of detail, but the external expert is responsible for the production of the initial report. REA ensures that sufficient detail is provided to support subsequent reports to be developed by REA [U5]. Previous evaluation reports are provided by REA as a guideline.

U5 REPORT CLARITY - Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.

When the evaluation results are presented to the various stakeholders, REA advises the external expert in dealing with each audience. REA is present at all presentations and available to answer questions, etc.

Subsequent to the external expert's report preparation, REA generates reports on an as-needed basis, in various formats, depending upon the audience. These might include summative reports or meta-analytical reports of the magnet programs, for example.

3. Magnet school supervisory and instructional staff from the participating school(s)

School program staff inform all evaluation parties of operational priorities and instructional context; in this, they serve as a "reality check" and provide vital information used in describing operational program practices and opportunity-to-learn features of the Magnet program.

REA enlists the full participation of the school-based Magnet program staff through full disclosure of the accountability assessment nature of the EPEM study of *their program* [P5]. Although this often yields some anxious moments, inclusion of program staff throughout the process and demonstration of how their input is used have proven time and again a vital component to the successful completion of each study undertaken.

P5 COMPLETE AND FAIR ASSESSMENT - The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

School staff provide general information such as annual School Improvement Plans in addition to the magnet-specific information [A1]. School staff also provide access to assessment sources. For example, class schedule information is necessary if classroom observations are to be scheduled. If parent surveys are to be sent home with students, school staff handles this. Access to students, teachers, parents, and lesson plans are all

A1 PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION - The program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.

coordinated by school staff.

4. External Content-Expert Evaluators

The external experts provide much of the assessment content, measurement standards, and results interpretation. By incorporating the expertise of an outside party on a short-term basis, several goals can be accomplished.

First, an increase in perceived credibility can be enjoyed due to the impartiality of the external party. These contracted evaluators are perceived as providing objectivity, because they have no stake in the positive or negative outcome of the evaluation. Evaluations conducted exclusively by internal parties, on the other hand, are open to criticisms of bias, rightly or wrongly.

Second, by bringing in experts who are familiar with other similar programs, the evaluation value is increased with minimum cost [F3]. A thorough evaluation of a given magnet program would, for example, include comparisons to other similar academic programs. The cost of launching an investigation of other programs across the country would be prohibitive. A content expert, however, provides this knowledge inherently. The evaluation time and money can be spent on gathering detailed information on the program under evaluation to maximum benefit.

F3 COST EFFECTIVENESS - The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified.

The external experts work closely with REA throughout the process. Their duties include reviewing the list of enacted practices, with an expert's eye, to ensure appropriateness and thoroughness. With REA's assistance, they develop and administer the assessment instruments such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations. The external experts also gather relevant literature, such as state/national standards, and review school-provided literature, such as lesson plans and effective school plans. In conjunction with REA staff, the external experts analyze the collected data and consolidate the results to reflect the enacted practices. This culminates in a final report, which will serve as the reference for any subsequent reports generated by REA. The external experts make presentations of the evaluation design and findings to the Superintendent's Executive Council and the Community Advisory Council. The School Board has the option to request a third presentation.

Upon completion of the report and the presentations, all materials become the property of REA.

Identifying Measurable Program Features

When REA is assigned a program to evaluate, and discusses it with sponsors or staff, it is generally a complicated affair. The evaluator's aim is to break the program down neatly into the form of measurable enacted practices, but there often seem to be so many different kinds of elements to consider that doing so is no easy task. With experienced help of REA staff for culling practices from ongoing operations, the multifaceted nature of the typical Magnet program must be parsimoniously organized into measurable enacted practices for research.

Wholey defines the *evaluable program* as "the portion of the program for which those in charge have defined plausible, measurable objectives; for which there are feasible sources of performance data; and for which likely uses of program performance information have been defined." By definition, the evaluable portion of Magnet Programs are the unique instructional experiences and opportunities designed to attract enrollment by students outside the Magnet school's catchment area. Accordingly, the portion of Magnet programs in need of evaluation are the unique instructional practices and opportunities provided students. In practice, when it comes to the 17 different types of Magnet programs offered in Prince George's County Public Schools, identifying each program's measurable features or *evaluable program* becomes quite challenging.

Established programs with standardized, measurable, well-defined characteristics enable straightforward evaluation. Montessori programs, for example, must adhere to the Montessori charter. In such well-established programs, evaluation is basically a matter of "certification"; that is, verifying that the program instructional practices, learning environment and opportunities meet the established documented standards in the Montessori charter[2].

Meeting the evaluation standard for identifying the evaluable features becomes more muddied, however, in Magnet programs offering non-traditional or relatively new educational initiatives experiences. In many such cases, the first evaluation challenge is to **identify and**

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[2] Formative Evaluation Study: The Montessori Magnet Program of Prince George's County, MD, Spring 1996, Research Report No. 48-9-96, REA, PGCPS, MD.

define the practices and opportunities which the program has ***enacted*** in an attempt to achieve its stated mission. This is where two vitally important features of the EPEM come into play: REA expert evaluation staff guiding Magnet program staff towards measurable practice statements; and the use of external experts in program content areas to refine the identification of purported enacted practices. The former activity occurs in the Request for Proposal (RFP) process of the EPEM, and the latter activity takes place during the initial stages of assessment instrument development process by the external experts who win the EPEM contract.

Prior to each evaluation project, the REA office works with the Magnet School Program Office and the participating schools to develop a few overarching practice statements which capture the essence of the magnet program [A3]. This step is critical. It is important that these be sufficiently tangible to allow measurement [A1] , yet general enough to permit the external expert some flexibility in determining whether the manner in which these practices are manifested truly meets the designed instructional **practice** as well as the **"quality standard"** for the instructional experience the content experts believe appropriate.

A3 DESCRIBED PURPOSES AND PROCEDURES - The purposes and procedures of the evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that they can be identified and assessed.

A1 PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION - the program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.

For example, if a "Humanities Magnet Program" promises instructional experiences that broaden literary perspective and literary analysis, an inadequately stated program practice might read:

"All students write monthly book reports".

An evaluable Humanities Magnet Program feature might read something like:

"Program requirements ensure that students expand their literary repertoire through an ongoing reading and analytical process".

While both statements provide measurable practices, the second statement captures the **goal** of the unique program practice rather than providing a laundry list of requirements which do not allow **qualitative assessment**. An external evaluator with content expertise in "Humanities" instructional programs might find, for example, that students are indeed completing monthly book reports, but that the instructional experience does not meet **"quality standards"** because the book selections and/or the teachers' use of the reading materials are too limited or inappropriate to challenge students' analytical skills as designated by the program.

The identification of Magnet program evaluable features is arguably the keystone in a successful program evaluation. The list of identified enacted program practices are included in the EPEM Request For Proposal (RFP) to communicate to prospective evaluation contractors the

evaluable portion of the Magnet program to be evaluated. Subsequently, the enacted practice statements guide evaluation design and assessment instrumentation selection and/or development. Further, the enacted practices provide a clear structure for the final reports, so that the reader clearly understands the nature and scope of the evaluation. The Executive Summary, in particular, benefits from the succinct nature of the enacted practices.

How do you measure "success"?

Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents. Denzin (1978) explains that the logic of triangulation is based on the premise that "...Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed. This is termed triangulation." (Denzin, 1978, p. 28) [U3]

U3 INFORMATION SCOPE AND SELECTION
- Information collected should be broadly selected to address pertinent questions about the program and be responsive to the needs and interests of clients and other specified stakeholders.

EPEM uses a triangulation technique which investigates the enacted practices from various viewpoints. It employs the subjective opinions of stakeholders in the magnet program, such as teachers, students, and parents; as well as the judgments of external content experts who have no personal concern with the evaluation outcome. The input of teachers, students and parents may be assessed through surveys, focus groups, or a combination of both. The external experts may review lesson plans, interview stakeholders, and/or observe classroom situations.

By probing multiple sources, evaluators can gather substantial evidence for their conclusions [A9]. Overlap of similar questions allows a comparison of each cohort group's results with the results from other groups. Consistent results from all sources would provide strong evidence for one interpretation of the assessed practice. Differences between various cohort's responses, however, might reflect differing concerns, motivations or impressions. Differences may be informative in and of themselves; they might simply reflect a bias of one group or they might indicate a need for better communication between groups, for example.

A9 ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE INFORMATION - Qualitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

This triangulation process helps to ensure that the information gathered in the evaluation is reliable [A6]. REA verifies that a sufficient sample size is probed with each technique.

A6 RELIABLE INFORMATION - "The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently reliable for the intended use

Process Standards From External Content Experts

When it comes to "accountability," credibility and acceptance are key to a successful evaluation study. There is no single component of the evaluation study which affects credibility and acceptance more than the persons conducting the evaluation [U2].

Through an RFP process, the consultant services of external evaluators who are content experts in the Magnet program selected for evaluation to serve on the EPEM evaluation team.

U2 EVALUATOR CREDIBILITY - The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.

So you've evaluated the program — now what?

The external expert is responsible for producing a report describing the program, the evaluation process, and the evaluation findings. This is the initial, complete report from which information for all future reports will be drawn. Responsibility for this report's content falls to the external expert, rather than other evaluation participants, to ensure impartiality [A11]. REA assists in the report development in terms of structure and clarity.

A11 IMPARTIAL REPORTING - Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.

REA's experience with the system stakeholders helps structure the report for maximum value. REA's overall guiding principle in assessing the report --- as manifest throughout the evaluation design and execution --- is that the report is crafted in such a way as to maximize its use.

This report should serve as a standalone document, containing sufficient information to describe the program to an audience unfamiliar with the program's details [U5]. Thus, in

addition to the list of enacted practices that describe the unique contributions of this magnet program, the report should include a brief history of the program and a description of the environment surrounding the program [A2]. For example, the magnet program is part of a system-wide desegregation effort; as such, it is important to describe the racial composition of the students in the district as a whole as well as the racial composition within the magnet program.

U5 REPORT CLARITY - Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.

A2 CONTEXT ANALYSIS - The context in which the program exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the program can be identified.

The report also contains a description of the assessment instruments, including copies of surveys or focus group questions. The methodology for gathering assessment information and the observed actual response rate are included. The analytical/statistical techniques for processing the gathered data are detailed. Conclusions, both positive and negative, are clearly identified [P5]. The primary findings are described in terms of the enacted practices identified at the outset of the evaluation effort. Incidental findings are also included.

P5 COMPLETE AND FAIR ASSESSMENT - The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

The specific information sources (e.g., survey items, focus group comments) for each conclusion and finding are specified [A10]. (See "*How do you measure success*" section for details.)

A10 JUSTIFIED CONCLUSIONS - The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that stakeholders can assess them.

After both parties (REA and external experts) are satisfied with the initial report, the external expert prepares a presentation of the evaluation results [P6]. REA provides suggestions and guidelines in a rehearsal session some days before the first official presentation.

P6 DISCLOSURE OF FINDINGS - The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and any others with expressed legal rights to receive the results.

The initial presentation is made to the Superintendent's Executive Council. The report is distributed to Council members a week before the meeting. At the meeting, the external experts briefly review the evaluation findings, and a discussion period ensues. REA, Magnet Program Office staff, and members of the schools' magnet staff (if appropriate) attend to field questions. The Council's comments and suggestions are used to refine and clarify the report prior to further dissemination. REA and the external experts modify the report, if necessary.

The refined report then follows two dissemination tracks. First, the accountability goals of the evaluation are satisfied by distributing the final report to the Superintendent's Executive Council, the School Board, and the Community Advisory Council (CAC) for the Magnet School Program. The School Board may or may not request a presentation of the results in addition to

the written report. The CAC always receives a presentation. This dissemination track permits a top-down (i.e., accountability) approach to dealing with study findings; that is, these supervisory bodies may demand programmatic changes or provide funding to enable such changes.

Two recent examples of top-down changes emanating from such an evaluation are illustrative. First, an evaluation of the Science, Mathematics and Technology magnet program revealed shortcomings in the available computer hardware which constrained the integration of technology into the teaching of math and science. Subsequently, all the schools in this program received upgraded hardware.

A second example comes from our Montessori evaluation. One finding was that parent participation was inconsistent between sites. As a result, a teacher network among the 5 buildings was established to share best practices for parent participation.

The second dissemination track has a feedback loop approach. In this case, REA staff and Magnet Program staff jointly provide detailed disaggregated feedback to the Magnet staff and teaching staff at the participating school(s). This provides an avenue for school-initiated changes. Routinely, the staff incorporates EPEM study results to modify, where appropriate, their annual "School Improvement Plan".

An example of the effectiveness of the feedback loop comes from our Montessori evaluation. Evaluators determined that longer uninterrupted work periods would enhance the effectiveness of the program. Since the evaluation, all school-based teams have been working

toward some form of block scheduling to alleviate some of the interruptions in the work period.

This completes the regular dissemination of EPEM results. The information then takes on a life of its own, appearing in various guises. REA may select specific aspects of the evaluation for inclusion in other reports, such as combining the EPEM results with student achievement results which are dissaggregated by Magnet program (i.e., summative). In the end, Lawrence B. Mohr (1992) offers very good advise on why evaluations should strive for quality in regards to dissemination and use of results:

> "Program evaluations cannot be expected to determine the outcomes of policy processes. These generally involve politics, bargaining, and trade-offs with other policies, ... The function of and evaluation is only to provide good information. However, that is a supremely important function. It is true that data will not always carry as much weight as pure rationality would dictate. What is important to recognize is that a sound evaluation with implications in favor of a certain policy alternative will provide powerful ammunition to the friends of that alternative and severe problems for its foes. That is why sound evaluation is important, where sound evaluation means recognizing the full scope of the task and doing the whole job well."(Mohr, 1992, page 209).

Summary

The authors are pleased with the Enacted Practices Evaluation Model as an accountability assessment system for promised instructional practices and opportunity-to-learn activities. We feel that we have successfully instantiated most of the *Standards*. Our evaluation projects clearly benefit from the credibility afforded by the participation of external experts. The team approach keeps the out-of-pocket cost of external expertise down. Not only does REA's continual involvement leverage the procured contributions of external expertise, but it also ensures quality control at each step of the evaluation process. The careful definition of measurable enacted practices helps to focus the entire evaluation effort, and also provides a clear framework with which to communicate the evaluation results to all stakeholders. Development efforts in the future will focus on improving methods to identify programs' enacted practices for evaluation and standardizing our reporting formats.

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Appendix 1

The Program Evaluation Standards

THE PROGRAM EVALUATION STANDARDS

Sound evaluations of educational programs, projects, and materials in a variety of settings should have four basic attributes:

- Utility
- Feasibility
- Propriety
- Accuracy

The Program Evaluation Standards, established by sixteen professional education associations, identify evaluation principles that when addressed should result in improved program evaluations containing the above four attributes.

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JCSEE PR-1994
Approved by the American
National Standards Institute
as an American National
Standard. Approval date:
March 15, 1994@

Utility

The utility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users.

U1 Stakeholder Identification Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed.

U2 Evaluator Credibility The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.

U3 Information Scope and Selection Information collected should be broadly selected to address pertinent questions about the program and be responsive to the needs and interests of clients and other specified stakeholders.

U4 Values Identification The perspectives, procedures, and rationale used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.

U5 Report Clarity Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.

U6 Report Timeliness and Dissemination Significant interim findings and evaluation reports should be disseminated to intended users, so that they can be used in a timely fashion.

U7 Evaluation Impact Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

Feasibility

The feasibility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.

F1 Practical Procedures The evaluation procedures should be practical, to keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained.

F2 Political Viability The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their cooperation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.

F3 Cost Effectiveness The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified.

Propriety

The propriety standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

P1 Service Orientation Evaluations should be designed to assist organizations to address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of targeted participants.

P2 Formal Agreements Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally to renegotiate it.

P3 Rights of Human Subjects Evaluations should be designed and conducted to respect and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects.

P4 Human Interactions Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation, so that participants are not threatened or harmed.

P5 Complete and Fair Assessment The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

P6 Disclosure of Findings The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and any others with expressed legal rights to receive the results.

P7 Conflict of Interest Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation processes and results.

P8 Fiscal Responsibility The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

Accuracy

The accuracy standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth of merit of the program being evaluated.

A1 Program Documentation The program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.

A2 Context Analysis The context in which the program exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the program can be identified.

A3 Described Purposes and Procedures The purposes and procedures of the evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that they can be identified and assessed.

A4 Defensible Information Sources The sources of information used in a program evaluation should be described in enough detail, so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed.

A5 Valid Information The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the interpretation arrived at is valid for the intended use.

A6 Reliable Information The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently reliable for the intended use.

A7 Systematic Information The information collected, processed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.

AS Analysis of Quantitative Information Quantitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

A9 Analysis of Qualitative Information Qualitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

AI0 Justified Conclusions The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that stakeholders can assess them.

A11 Impartial Reporting Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.

A12 Metaevaluation The evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against these and other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.

Guidelines and illustrative cases to assist evaluation participants in meeting each of these standards are provided in *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Sage, 1994), The illustrative cases are based in a variety of educational settings that include schools, universities, medical and health care fields, the military, business and industry, the government, and law.

Appendix 2

Example Evaluation Study RFP
K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program

Request for Proposal
The Board of Education of Prince George's County
Research, Evaluation and Accountability

The Board of Education of Prince George's County

Research, Evaluation and Accountability

Formative Evaluation Study
K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program

Request for Proposal

September 1996

Introduction The Research, Evaluation and Accountability (REA) office of The Board of Education of Prince George's County, in conjunction with the Magnet School Office is conducting a formative evaluation of the K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet program. This effort involves the on-site qualitative evaluation by the awardee of the contract.

Purpose Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) is seeking proposals from experts/institutions to complete a qualitative/formative evaluation of the educational program within the School District's **K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet School**.(Thomas G. Pullen)

Program Description The Creative and Performing Arts at Thomas Pullen is open to students in Kindergarten through eight grade. It is designed to develop the interests and talents of students in the arts and features an enhanced interdisciplinary academic program that encourages creative and artistic expression. Experience and training are designed to challenge and develop skills of all students, as well as to provide exceptional opportunity for artistically talented students.

The curriculum provides in-depth experiences in each art discipline, plus related arts experiences and an infusion of the arts in the overall curriculum. The arts are provided as an integral part of a strong academic program.

The K-8 Creative Arts School follows the general curriculum guidelines that are used in all Prince George's County public elementary and middle schools. Basic instruction is provided in reading, mathematics, English, science, and social studies, as well as specialized instruction in the arts - art, drama, music, dance, physical education, creative writing, media production, literary arts, and related computer lab experiences.

Evaluation Objective

The principal investigator(s), using their expertise in Art Education, will assess the level of program implementation enacted within the participating school and classrooms. Specifically, the qualitative evaluation will assess the degree to which the Prince George's County Public School's curricula are put into actual classroom practice. Assessment data will be gathered through on-site structured observations, interviews, surveys, etc. Final analysis will show the degree to which declared practices have been enacted, as well as a summary of "best practices" observed.

The scope of this evaluation is an examination of how well the Thomas G. Pullen School has implemented the creative and performing arts magnet program. The program curriculum and instructional practices specifically associated with the Thomas Pullen program are:

1. The integration of the creative and performing arts with academic learning, specifically:

A. Academic instruction enhances the creative and performing arts;

B. Creative and performing arts instruction enhances academic learning.

2. The multicultural thread is woven through both the academic and creative and performing arts program.

3. Students develop a knowledge of and appreciation for the arts.

Therefore, the evaluation focus is to measure Pullen's ability to integrate the creative and performing arts with academic learning, develop an interdisciplinary approach to instruction stressing academic achievement, creativity, artistic expression, and an appreciation for cultural diversity.

Consultant Services Required

On behalf of the REA and the Magnet Office, the principal investigator shall perform the following services in the formative evaluation of the K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program:

1. Demonstrate a high level of understanding of the Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program, at both the elementary and middle school levels, its design, objectives, enrollment procedures, curriculum, teaching strategies staffing and staff development. (This may require school visits, office visits, interviews, observations, etc.)

2. Consult with program coordinator(s) and REA to verify findings from #1.

3. Present to REA copies of all data collection instruments (i.e. surveys, observation forms, interview questions, etc.) for approval to implement.

4. Design an evaluation time table and present to REA a detailed schedule.

5. Design and submit to REA prototypes of all reporting formats of graphs, tables and charts for approval to implement.

6. Prepare in advance of data collection activities, a prototype report outline, introduction section and table of contents of the summary report for approval to REA.

7. Conduct a structured field study data collection at Thomas G. Pullen. The structured field study may be completed using REA approved surveys, focus groups, observations, interviews, video tapings, etc.

8. Collect and compile measurable data that yields a **quantifiable representation** of the enacted practices pertaining to program, teaching strategies, and curriculum components.

9. Analyze data for the degree of agreement between declared practices and those practices actually observed. Report on the degree of agreement between declared and observed practices. Using the declared practices as the goal, list the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

10. Deliver a **first** draft, a revised **second** draft, and a **final** report document. All documents shall be delivered in both hard-copy and soft-copy (Word Perfect 6.1) format.

11. Prepare and give a presentation with overheads (or computer presentation graphics) to the School System's Executive Council, the Board of Education, and the Community Advisory Council.

Schedule — The final report document shall be delivered to REA no later than close of business on May 15, 1997.

The Board of Education of Prince George's County
Research, Evaluation and Accountability

Formative Evaluation Study
K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program

Request for Proposal

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

I. Cover Sheet

II. Abstract (100 words, maximum)

Narrative (5 pages, maximum)

Expertise and background of institution and/or investigation
Evaluation questions to be addressed
Data collection procedures and methodology
Instrumentation
Schedule and Time line of Activities

IV. Budget

V. Reference Letters (3, minimum)

VI. Resumes (of all assigned staff and indicating Principal Investigator(s))

VII. Assurances and Certifications

EOE
Drug-free Workplace
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities
Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility

VIII. Submit completed proposal to REA by 5:00 p.m., Friday, November 15, 1996

The Board of Education of Prince George's County
Research, Evaluation and Accountability

Formative Evaluation Study
K-8 Creative and Performing Arts Magnet Program

Request for Proposal

COVER SHEET

Organization Name:_____

Organization Address:_____
_____

Organization Telephone Number:_____

Name(s) of Principal Investigator(s) _____
_____
_____
_____

Amount of Request: $_____

Signature of Authorized Representative : _____

Title : _____

Date Signed : _____

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